

## To Pitcairn and Beyond \*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper unpacks two episodes of twentieth century 'look see' travel (and tourism) traditions in the Pacific—one at Pitcairn Island and the other at the Galápagos Islands—through a travel narrative collected from the key folklorist J.S. Ryan. An episode from that narrative, the 1954 breaking of a piston on the *Ruahine*, is also explored, providing more contextual information for the episode than is available in previously published accounts. Finally, the way that these events, and those that followed them, contributed to the development of Ryan's folkloric mindset is examined.

**KEYWORDS:** Pitcairn Island, Galápagos Islands, Panama, New Zealand meat exports, T.S.S. *Ruahine*, J.R.R. Tolkien, E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Frank Fyfe, J.S. Ryan

As scholars, when we consider the place of a landscape's lore, history and language, it is often also relevant to consider the way in which the folklorists and anthropologists who recorded those traditions interacted with the places being studied. Such considerations go toward how thinkers may have formed their impressions of societies, or even the world. Emeritus Professor John S. Ryan often recounts, with animated delight, stories of his travels past Pitcairn Island, and around Panama, in the 1950s, while travelling to the United Kingdom to undertake postgraduate studies as a Commonwealth graduate and with Advanced Status in the University of Oxford. That story highlights a number of important ideas: it provides an authentic example of the Pitcairn (and more broadly Pacific) 'look see' travel and tourism traditions of the twentieth century, a contextualization and additional information about the *Ruahine* breaking her starboard piston in 1954, and, a significant aspect of the process through which Ryan formed his folkloric mindset.

The discussion is of particular interest to this edition of *Australian Folklore*, both as a response to comments within Maria Amoamo's article, 'Pitcairn Island: Heritage of Bounty Descendants', which notes the ship-

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\* The authors would like to acknowledge the expert assistance of Ian Farquhar in preparing this study. Farquhar is a New Zealand based maritime historian, and his papers—including information about the *Ruahine*—are now housed at the Hocken Library in Dunedin—taking some thirty shelf meters.

based 'look see' traditions of Pitcairn Island,<sup>1</sup> and because of the focus, in this issue, upon the formation of a school of folkloric thinking in Australia during the twentieth century, which was, in several ways, deeply influenced by, and linked to, the mindset and work of Ryan.



Figure 1. *The Ruahine in Otago Harbour, 1954. Photo from the Ian Farquhar Collection.*<sup>2</sup>

Finally, in unpacking Ryan's interactions with south-sea 'look see' travel and tourism traditions, we reveal important, and additional information, about an almost disastrous incident aboard the *Ruahine* in 1954, during which a piston was broken while she was off the usual steamer route. That information shifts understandings of the geographical location where the incident occurred, and of events leading to it. In current historical discourses the episode took place 'shortly before reaching Balboa',<sup>3</sup> a port city in Panama. Yet, per Ryan's testimony, it transpired in the waters of Ecuador. Ryan's narrative also provides a sound reason for

<sup>1</sup> It may be interest to readers to note that the same 'look see' tradition exists in shipboard tales of the Galápagos group.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Farquhar took this photograph from Pulling Point on Otago Harbour, with a postcard camera. Films were 3A size. This photograph also forms part of the material record of the now almost extinct port-based tradition of members of the public photographing visiting ships. The Farquhar Collection holds an extensive material record of that folk tradition.

<sup>3</sup> Laxon, W.A., Ian J. Farquhar and N.J. Kirby; based on the draft by F.W. Perry, *Crossed Flags: The histories of the New Zealand Shipping Company Limited and the Federal Steam Navigation Company Limited and their Subsidiaries* (Gravesend, England: World Ship Society, 1997), p. 91.

why former discourses may have presumed the wrong location for the incident.

As a final section of the article, there will be discussion of the way that these events, and those that immediately followed them in the United Kingdom, helped shape a young Ryan's folkloric mindset, drawing upon his reflections on the folkloric mindsets of others, such as Frank Eyre and Grahame Johnston. Parallels will also be drawn to life events key to a selection of other leading folkloric thinkers.

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### *Collecting the Narrative and Conducting this Research*

Over discussions spanning more than two decades, and then culminating with a series of telephone calls and email-based conversations, Jøn pieced together the narrative of Ryan's trip—and both the linked 'look see' episodes and the breaking of *Ruahine's* piston. The narrative was then reviewed, for consistency, by Ryan. The themes associated with the development of Ryan's folkloric mindset were also the product of those long-running discussions between Jøn and his mentor, Ryan.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, many of the key concepts explored in those sections of the text draw closely upon notions that Ryan, himself, identified.

Supporting archival research into both Ryan's, and the *Ruahine's*, voyage was conducted, and provided, by Ward to augment this study, and at several times the expert maritime historian Ian Farquhar was consulted.

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### *About the Ruahine and Her Voyage*

The T.S.S. *Ruahine* sailed with the New Zealand Shipping Company, and had 425,000 sq. ft. of refrigeration space. Built by John Brown & Co. Ltd., at Clydebank in the United Kingdom, she spanned 178.15 metres, or some 584.5 feet, and operated on two six-cylinder 2SCSA Doxford diesel engines. While only possessing one passenger class, she could carry 267 passengers in addition to her refrigerated cargo.

The official record notes that she was launched on the 11th of December 1950,<sup>5</sup> being delivered to the New Zealand Shipping Company

<sup>4</sup> Jøn first met Ryan in 1995.

<sup>5</sup> *P&O Heritage: Ship Fact Sheet for the Ruahine (1951)* (November 2009) <http://www.poheritage.com/Upload/Mimsy/Media/factsheet/94420RUAHINE-1951.pdf> Notably, the New Zealand Shipping Company also possessed an earlier vessel called the *Ruahine*, which was assisted by the Union Steam Ship Company's *Wahine* when she sprang a leak on 25 October 1914.

in May, 1951, and then commencing her service with a maiden voyage to London on the 22nd of that month, during which she carried 12,000 tons of cargo and a large complement of passengers. Records indicate (*ibid.*) that her voyages soon came to include a range of calls 'to increase the service's attraction', at locations such as: Pitcairn, Kingston, Bermuda and Tahiti. The ethos of adding calls to increase the attraction of the *Ruahine's* service aligns with Ryan's description of the *ad hoc* way that a 'look see' call to the Galápagos group was added to this 1954 voyage.

Form details: Form No. 15-000-1120 C.S. Co. Ltd. 4497. P.M. 23. Name of Ship: M.V. "RUAHINE". Port of Arrival: SOUTHAMPTON. Date of Arrival: 1954. Steamship Line: NEW ZEALAND SHIPPING COMPANY LIMITED. Whence Arrived: WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND.

(1) Port of Embarkation	(2) Port at which Passengers have been landed	(3) NAMES OF PASSENGERS	(4) CLASS	(5) AGES OF PASSENGERS						(6) Proposed Address in the United Kingdom	(7) Profession, Occupation, or Calling of Passengers	(8) Country of last Permanent Residence *	(9) Country of Intended Future Permanent Residence *				
				Adults of 17 years and over		Children under 17		Infants under 2					England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland
				Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females								
WELLINGTON	SOUTHAMPTON	REDFERN, Dorothy E.	ONE					9	298 Stockport Road, Gee Cross, Hyde, Cheshire.	Infant	N. Zealand	1					
204	"	ROBBINS, Sabina	"				62	8 Lynton, Lawrence Walk, Weston, Bristol.	Housewife	England	1						
205	"	RODGER, Margaret A.	"				55	73 Newcroft Drive, Glasgow S.W.	Clerk	N. Zealand		1					
206	"	ROSENFELDT, Kenneth	"				21	82 Headley Drive, Ilford, Essex.	Carpenter	"			1				
207	"	RYAN, John Spratt	"				25	Newton College, Oxford.	Student	"			1				
208	"	SCHMIDT, Irmentrout	"				22	c/o New Zealand House, 415 Strand, London.	Trained Nurse	"			1				
			"				16	15 Clare Terrace, ...	Driller	"			1				

Figure 2. The official arrivals documentation for one John Spratt RYAN.

Those same records, much like references to the vessel in the history, *Crossed Flags: The Histories of the New Zealand Shipping Company Limited and the Federal Steam Navigation Company Limited and their Subsidiaries*, indicate the *Ruahine* providing an uneventful and successful service until the 1954 sailing that Ryan boarded in Wellington—departing 25 August. We understand, from Ford, that the voyage made Pitcairn on 31 August.<sup>6</sup> The official record then notes her arrival at Panama on September 7th, needing five days of repairs after she 'broke a piston in her starboard engine shortly before reaching Balboa, bound Wellington to Southampton'.

Articles from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, published on the 5th and 9th of October, 1954,<sup>7</sup> detail a dispute by port workers throughout the United Kingdom which affected the unloading of her cargo. It is likely that this

<sup>6</sup> Ford, Herbert, *Pitcairn Island as a Port of Call: A Record, 1790–2010*, 2nd edn. (McFarland, 2012), p. 178.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, '15,000 Dock Men Out in London', *Sydney Morning Herald* (5 October, 1954), p. 3. Staff Correspondent, 'London Strike Spreads', *Sydney Morning Herald* (9 October, 1954), p. 3.

situation compounded the problems of the *Ruahine* and her passengers. With the arrival of the meat already delayed, and then it not being able to be offloaded quickly, there would have been some anxiety caused to the importers. This is highlighted by Ryan's comments, below, about some six to eight officials inspecting the meat and chilling facilities upon her arrival at Tilbury, and the fact that passengers did not offload at Southampton as scheduled and indicated on the tickets as issued.

However, there are minor inconsistencies surrounding evidence of the arrival date, and passenger departure location, for this voyage. The official record of passenger arrivals documentation includes an entry for one John Sprott RYAN (see above). That entry records the port of arrival as being Southampton. However, a *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper article, from Tuesday 5 October, as noted above, says passengers landed at Tilbury on the previous Saturday (2 October 1954)—which is in line with Ryan's narrative. This may indicate a pattern of inconsistencies within the official record of the voyage; and also, is typical of identified errors of fact found in the documentation of other like voyages during that period. Further highlighting the factually sloppy nature of that official record, the above entry for Ryan's arrival in England lists his 'Proposed Address' as Newton College in Oxford, when in fact, it should have read Merton College in Oxford.

These readily identified, and seemingly frequent, errors of fact in official archival records lend weight to the possibility that the location of the *Ruahine* breaking her piston, as suggested by Ryan's narrative, may well indicate an omission in the official record, or further administrative carelessness regarding that voyage in failing to distinguish the events as taking place in Ecuador rather than Panama.

While also presenting the ship-borne 'look see' phenomenon of the Pacific, the following narrative, as recorded from the recollections of Ryan, sheds further light on both an additional call and the piston-breaking incident of the voyage, as well as the way the passengers occupied themselves in Panama while waiting for the repairs to be completed. Additionally, as will be discussed below, the narrative also provides an insight into key segments of the formation of Ryan's own folkloric-thinking.

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*The Pitcairn 'Look See' in the Words of John S. Ryan*

The ship that I would depart New Zealand upon was the *Ruahine*. I would leave New Zealand for more than 6 years, as from my sailing, having for the first time seen the Canterbury Plains, Wellington, and then sailed, all within twenty-four hours. We sailed on the 25th of August, 1954,

from the central overseas wharf in Wellington. I had boarded the ship on a wharf not far from the one that I had arrived to Wellington on, after making my way from Christchurch on the night ferry of 24th. It was the first time in my life that I had left the South Island.

I was in an outside cabin on the *Ruahine*, with 6 berths, I in an upper bunk. I can see the general area of my cabin in the photo contained above (Figure 1). I ate on the navigator's table in the dining room. There were at four hour intervals changes in the watches, and their feet banged and clanged on the metal steps, very close to my head. As pictures still show, the ship was very spacious for the small numbers involved.

There was in my cabin one Quentin Almao, a part Portuguese fellow, whose father was in the Colonial Service. There were four other men, not very close to me at all, as they busied themselves gambling a great deal. I only recall one other shipmate by name, old Michael Macadam, going from a teaching post in the Auckland Province to Westminster College in Cambridge, he also starting those studies in the October of 1954.

There was a sense of history as we approached Pitcairn Island. I recalled tales of the story books, of *The Mutiny on the Bounty*, as studied in the library of my primary school. Also, small books on the story, in the displays in the then bookshop of Whitcombe and Tombs, to the north of the Exchange, in George Street [Dunedin].

While we sat off Pitcairn Island there were three men or four men in a craft, with a small motor, who came out to meet us. It was said that the craft was even used in storms. In the distance, I think, children on the reef to our half right. We had stopped at a sort of moorings in the open outer-water, rather than at a wharf of any sort.

It was then that I saw Fletcher Christian the 7th (I think) in a small boat at our ship's side. Fletcher was very easy in his conversation with the Senior Officer/ Ship's Master. Fletcher Christian was slim, above average height, and not, I think, particularly Polynesian in his looks. He seemed a very fit man, confident and striking. The others seemed a bit Polynesian. I think that they were all clean shaven.

Mail was exchanged, and some talk. I believe that the navigating officer—on whose table I sat—was also talking to the men from the shore. We were there about 1 1/2 hours in all. All that while Fletcher Christian had been on board, and amongst the talk and exchange of parcels and mail.

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*The Galápagos 'Look See', the Breaking of Ruahine's Piston and Time in Panama, in the Words of John S. Ryan*

After departing from Pitcairn, we went off the usual steamer route, something I had discussed with my table Officer, the ship's Navigator. I was very friendly with the Navigating Officer, and we used to talk trigonometry and the like, as with shooting the sun. I had thus been on the bridge, as he was plotting a number of distances we were from the more used steamer routes.

We had travelled off route towards the Galápagos Islands because of a decision made by the Navigator and Officers, to please a Zoologist from Victoria University College, also onboard, who wanted to sight those Darwinian places. The digression towards Galápagos was done since the arc north in the then modified course was deemed not to materially increase the distance steamed. There were no further sightings of land prior to the Galápagos Islands.

Just after Galápagos there was a loud explosion in the starboard engine. The explosion took place towards sunset, and before dinner, only the one sitting, for there were only about two hundred and fifty passengers. Luckily, it did not burn. Many passengers after the bump in the gathering dusk, and the stopping of the engines, had donned their life jackets, and sat near the lifeboats. There was a little quiet singing, but most were very silent. A little after 10.30 pm, the Tannoy blared: 'Attention, attention; this is your Captain speaking. You may have noticed that we are not under way. There has been a slight problem in the Engine Room. We will resume our voyage at first light. May you have a good evening.' Thus, we went at various times to bed.

As I recall it, we had a problem with a piston coming out of the casing, but above the water line. There was a fear that the damage may expand if the ship was pushed, so it had to crawl along, almost like a crab. The ship made a crawl from there, on one engine, to Panama, and our jerky passage finally got us to the Pacific end of the Panama Canal in the late afternoon.

In Panama they said that due to the damage they did not trust the ship to successfully navigate the Panama Canal by night, so, we went through in daylight, with the ship still not steering perfectly. When we arrived at the Atlantic end of the Canal, we were moved by tugs into the adjacent American Navy's dry dock, where we were to stay for 5 or 6 days.

We then spent almost a week in the American Naval Dockyard at the Caribbean end of the Panama Canal. Much of Panama, despite being an independent country, was swarming with American servicemen who continually checked our identity, despite our dress, so different, and our pale New Zealand complexions. Initially we have been kept on the ship, but permission was given to us to go ashore, since we were sitting on a ship, not out of the water, and in the boiling sun.

I went ashore several times. Some of the passengers went on bus trips while we waited, but these were too expensive for me, so I took the train to Panama City, seeing churches and the abject poverty, beggars, and the lottery ticket sellers hawking tickets to the poor. Those tickets pinned on boards to show the numbers, at every street corner. There was such lush vegetation in the parks.

I also walked in the a sprawling park cemetery, extending over a large space between the dry dock—run by the American Navy—and the eastern side of Panama City. I seem to recall a notice saying that more than 40,000 were buried there, mainly British, working at the excavation of the Canal. I read names and places of the dead. I had gone walking there despite warnings of danger, because of being too cooped up on the ship. I also walked back along the line of the Canal itself, to watch the mules—the small powered electric motors—which pulled the ships through the locks.

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*The 'Sprint' to England and Some Consequences of his Time in the Tropics, in the Words of John S. Ryan*

No one got off at Plymouth because of the value of selling the chill (not frozen) meat, and so, there was this sprint to deliver the cargo. Finally, it limped not to Southampton, but to Tilbury, to offload the chilled meat, which was going off. We made it to Tilbury about five days late, and the meat starting to smell a little. I recall that there were some 6-8 health officials to check on the state of the meat.

My time in the tropics would seem to have taken a toll upon me. I had not had any Malaria or other injections before leaving New Zealand, and I would land up in the Oxfordshire and Berkshire County hospital's fever ward at the end of the Michaelmas Term. I was never correctly diagnosed, as the certificate said for my discharge said 'pyrexia of unknown origin'. I would be overcome by a like fever towards the end of my Oxford Degree examinations in early June, 1957.

This is enough for now, but the *Ruahine* story was much discussed in 1957-1958, amongst old shipmates from the old *Ruahine*. Later she would be broken up in the Far East.

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*Galápagos and the Location of the 1954 Ruahine Incident*

All elements of the currently published historical narrative, of the *Ruahine* breaking her piston while approaching Balboa, align with Ryan's



account—apart from the omission of the waters of Ecuador as the location of the incident.

Ian Farquhar, a New Zealand based maritime historian, was consulted about the possible validity of the narrative—regarding the proposed location of the breaking of a piston. He noted that only 'a slight variation on a great circle course from a New Zealand port to Panama would go close to the Galápagos group.' Given the events of the narrative, Farquhar's comment would seem to add further weight to Ecuador being the actual location of the incident. The highlighted *ad hoc* nature of Galápagos being added as a call *en route* also reinforces the frequency with which 'look see' traditions persisted in twentieth century Pacific sea travel.

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*Finally, the Life-Event Pattern Which Contributed to Forming Ryan's Folkloric Thinking*

Ryan's 'look see' narratives also dovetail with a process of cultural displacement, which he endured, beginning in 1954, as a circumstance of his academic training. He has noted in many conversations that it was that cultural displacement which acted as a catalyst, starting the to-be-folklorist off on his unplanned career path.<sup>8</sup> In those conversations, Ryan identifies the crucial pattern of these events as being:

- Home;
- Travel;
- Developing a sense of difference;
- Discovering the drivers of that sense of difference, and that forging the habit of observation and recording;
- Gaining guides on the way, in Ryan's case the primary one being J.R.R. Tolkien, another displaced colonial.

Ryan's own interest in this pattern of life events, as being contributive factors in developing the folkloric mindset of notable scholars, may easily be discerned from his recent study of Frank Eyre and Grahame K.W.

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<sup>8</sup> As works representative of his folkloristic thinking, see his works: *The Land of Ulitarra: Early Records of the Aborigines of the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales*, Department of University Extension (University of New England, Grafton, 1954). 'German Mythology Applied—the Extension of the Literary Folk Memory', *Folklore*, vol. 77, no. 1 (1966), pp. 45-59. doi:10.1080/0015587X.1966.9717029. 'Myth Criticism as Discipline', *Westerly*, vol.2 (1973), pp. 49-58. 'Australian Folklore Yesterday and Today: Definitions and Practices', *eFolklore*, vol. 8 (1998), pp. 127-134. doi:10.7592/FEJF1998.08.aflore

Johnston,<sup>9</sup> wherein he notes such patterns for the following not-Australian-born scholars who have greatly contributed to academic and popular understandings of Australian identity and lore: Eyre, Johnston, Rolf-Boldrewood and S.J. Baker. Another insight to the way that he views this phenomenon might be gained from his comment, in that article, that:

The just cited—if somewhat esoteric—Tolkien link for the driving forces behind Grahame Johnston is a fascinating one, as is the background of the English landscape shaping the mind and heart of Frank Eyre, and the two men are, rightly to be seen as its 1960s and 1970s incoming ‘champions’.

—stressing the place of key mentors, such as, in both this and his own case, Tolkien.

In a range of discussions with Jøn, Ryan also noted that during his time in England, a second, and equally important, guide appeared for his folkloric thinking, through a scholarly relationship that he struck up with Hilda Ellis-Davidson. Ryan explained having a series of meetings, occurring only by happenstance, with Ellis-Davidson, which also helped shape his interest in the discipline.

A similar pattern can be identified in the life of Frank Fyfe, the founding President of the short-lived New Zealand Folklore Society.<sup>10</sup> Fyfe was an Australian who found himself displaced within New Zealand, and benefited from highly-regarded folkloric guides including Bill Scott and Robert Mitchell.<sup>11</sup> Paralleling Ryan in Australia, Fyfe became an Anzac citizen working diligently to collect and record the folk culture of the 'other' of the two Tasman nations.

Perhaps also close to the Ryan story, might be the life tale of E.O.G. Turville-Petre. Although in some respects Turville-Petre never really left his family in Yorkshire, and the titles that would be inherited by his close kinsmen, he did spend a long period abroad as an interpreter, and assistant to the war effort, in the several years he was a British Agent in Iceland—during which he immersed himself in that northern culture. Like Ryan, Turville-Petre benefitted from J.R.R. Tolkien as an academic supervisor and mentor. After completing his studies at Oxford University and spending time in Iceland, Turville-Petre eventually become a Knight of the

<sup>9</sup> Ryan, John S., 'Frank Eyre (1910-1988), a significant shaper for: definitive writing of Australian history and culture, supporting the nation's myth-makers, and most important national identity recorders from 1948 to 1976', *Australian Folklore*, 31 (2016).

<sup>10</sup> See: Frank Fyfe, 'New Zealand Folklore Society: Some Results', *Heritage*, vol. 1, October (1967), pp. 4-7 + 15: and; Frank Fyfe, 'Why Collect?', *Sing: Bulletin of the Wellington Folk Club* (17 April, 1966), pp. 35-36.

<sup>11</sup> See: New Zealand Folklore Society & Harris, S.M., '12 October 1967. New Zealand Folklore Society (Per SM Harris, Honorary Secretary) to R Mitchell. Re : Thanks for Hospitality Extended to Chairman (Frank Tyfe) on Recent Brisbane Visit', in *Robert Mitchell Collection—UQFL 78. University of Queensland, Fryer Library*, Letter.

Falcon (Iceland), a member of the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy (Sweden), and then returned the first Vigfusson Reader in Ancient Icelandic Literature and Antiquities, at Oxford University (1941), publishing a raft of notable studies on matters concerned with topics of Nordic lore and language.



Figure 3. Ryan (top row, second from left) and Tolkien (bottom row, second from right) at Merton College, Oxford, 1955.

Similar life processes can be noted for a range of other key Folklorists, such as Professor John Widdowson, who, born in England's Sheffield, relocated to Canada's Newfoundland, and among many other significant achievements became the first executive of the Canadian Oral History Association while recording important Canadian lore.

J.R.R. Tolkien, himself, also fits the rough pattern, having been born in the Orange Free State, removed to England, and then travelling both before, and quite reluctantly during,<sup>12</sup> the first world war—as a temporary

<sup>12</sup> Tolkien wrote: 'In those days chaps joined up, or were scorned publicly. It was a nasty cleft to be in for a young man with too much imagination and little physical courage.' Carpenter, Humphrey and Christopher Tolkien (eds.), *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), no. 43. He also stated: 'Junior officers were being killed off, a dozen a minute. Parting from my wife then [...] it was like a death'. Quoted by John Garth in, *Tolkien and the Great War* (Harper-Collins, 2003), p. 138.

second lieutenant in the Lancashire Fusiliers.<sup>13</sup> Much weight was added to the cultural displacement, and sense of difference, endured by Tolkien, due to his difference in religion, and his religious conversion at the age of eight.

Further, many dialectologists, sooner or later, become folklorists, as of the changing attitudes of the mass of the populace. It may well also be argued that most dialectologists draw material from oral/ folkloric materials, and that their travels into dialects foreign to their mother tongue sharpen those instincts.

These events, as recorded in the above narrative, sparked Ryan's already keen interest in the lore of the Pacific-region—as he notes when recalling the memory of books on the *Bounty* from Dunedin. The time of his only visit to Panama and the Canal region further installed a sense of wonder, which would transform into an acute understanding of cultural differences, and differences in traditions, while studying at Oxford and then Cambridge. That realization, coupled with the guidance of key mentors—Tolkien and Ellis-Davidson—helped form elements of his folkloric mindset.

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